

'The parliamentary system is j

Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain spoke with Azmul Haq at length on many political issues that confront the PML(N) in particular and the country in general.

Ch. Shujaat is number two in PL(MN) echelons. In elections since 1985, his family has been producing more Senators/MNAs & MPAs than most other "Punjabi Siyasi Clans". He and his family held sway over Gujrat for all these years.

It was only in election '93 when his spell broke and he was numbed by PPP's Ahmed Mukhtar and Nawabzada Gul. The strongman from Gujrat has had to settle for a Senate seat, a gift from Mian Nawaz Sharif!

This what he had to say.

The PML(N) agitated against the government on one hand while on the other the PML(N)-sponsored "Ifikhar Gillani Peace Package" has surfaced on the floor of the house. How do you relate the two?

Ifikhar Gillani was criticized in our last parliamentary meeting. He has explained that his move for constitutional amendments (especially the 8th amendment reform package) has nothing to do with our protest movement. In fact, that was our demand. I feel that we need to keep trying to identify the amendments required in the constitution for as long as parliament exists. I don't think we should link it with the Tehrik-e-Nijaz.

This implies that you are trying to negotiate a constitutional package with a party you want removed from government by agitation. How can both be possible at the same time?

Let us not confuse the two. The constitutional package was our idea and was floated originally when we thought these assemblies and system must work. In the nine months that followed, we stand convinced that this government is out to destroy every bit of this country.

We feel that Benazir is taking the country to the brink destruction. Corruption is rampant. I don't think it will take long for her to flee the country and leave the game to Murtaza Bhutto.

But why don't you still move such a bill—even if it is defeated on the Floor. You'll at least be on record for having stressed a point you believe in!

I must concede that I am not too sure of how such a move in the National Assembly would end up, but we are discussing the issue in Senate.

Since the Habibullah case is subjudice, I shall only ask you about its impact on the political PR of your family. The people think it has been disastrous!

Let me make a point here! The Habibullah case is not subjudice. It is under investigation in a "Thana". Whatever you read in the press are "Thana" statements released by the "Thana-Wallas". Just one statement has been recorded in the High Court, that too after one of the judges who was then an advocate general, himself said in court that they 'did not wish to prosecute. This case is only to intimidate our MPAs or win them over.

What do you think about the possibility of PML unification? Majeed Nizami's recent press statement claiming Nawaz Sharif was willing to give up the PML(N) presidency has given the scenario a new dimension.

Nawaz Sharif did not know of this. I feel such a situation cannot arise until the "Wattoo League" stops functioning as a PPP subsidiary. We really don't give much importance to the "Sarkari League". Let them first say goodbye to the PPP then we can then sit down to talk.

Will Mian Nawaz Sharif be ready to step down then?

Why? That is not the issue at all! Hamid Nasir Chattha's reason to part ways was on the premise that no individual should hold two offices within the party. Since Nawaz Sharif was the PM, he should not have become the president of PML.

Where are Mr. Chattha's principles now? Is Mr. Wattoo not holding two offices. If this is okay for Wattoo it must also be okay for Nawaz Sharif!

Of late PML(N) has criticised the parliamentary system. Your party chief has gone on record rejecting the present system as unfunctional and preferring a presidential system of government.

What are your views on the issue?

People of this country have started saying the parliamentary system of government is 'not working in Pakistan. We have had three elections in five years whereas we should have had only one!

There are so many flaws in the system that it has now become useless and people are now openly talking of either amending it or of

finding a better solution.

What is your personal opinion on the matter?

I frankly do not see this system progressing. It is just not working. It would be premature for me to comment on what the replacement should be but I am convinced of the ineffectiveness of the present system.

But Murtaza and Benazir seem on a political warpath?

It is actually a class conflict between Murtaza Bhutto and Asif Zardari. Murtaza Bhutto does not accept Asif as an equal. With Benazir, he only has to settle his inheritance matters. The moment that is done, they will return to normal. In our opinion they are politically united!

Some references have been filed with the speaker for the disqualification of Mian Nawaz Sharif and certain other PML(N) MNAs. Why have you been spared?

I am not an MNA. A Senator is needed to file a reference against me. I have learnt that a similar move is under way and there might be some action in the forthcoming Senate session. Let's see! I'll face whatever comes my way.

One of the reasons cited in the references is "criticism of the judiciary". Do you think it is fair to attack institutions this way?

I have personally supported institutions. I am an advocate for strengthening institutions, be it the judiciary or the Army. At the same time I felt that it is high time we understand the important difference between a functionary of the institution & the institution itself.

There are corrupt people everywhere. There are bad things happening in every sphere of life which we must stand up and pinpoint in an institution. No individual should be above criticism!

When you were the interior minister in the Nawaz Sharif government, Benazir Bhutto proposed (on the floor of the house) amending the constitution vis-a-vis senior appointments in major institutions with the consensus of the leader of the Opposition of the day. Why did you not accept this?

(Smiles) The assemblies did not last long enough!

If your party still believes in the basic philosophy of that proposal. Why not move a similar one again? She might respond positively.

We have already tabled an adjournment motion in the Senate.

We have reminded Benazir of her proposal, but we know she won't accept ours! She's even forgotten her own proposal (when she was the leader of opposition) that the leader of the Opposition should be given the facilities & status of a federal minister with a government phone, transport, guards etc.!

In response, she has just given Nawaz Sharif a notice to get rid of even his private guards. If she cannot give him these minor facilities, do you think she'll ever want a consensus on any major issue? There are too many contradictions in what is said and done.

Nawaz Sharif's supporters have endorsed his statement on the nuclear issue. We have also seen much criticism of his statement in the press and from other political camps. His speech has been labeled an "irresponsible political gimmick against the national interest". What is your comment?

Let us get the perspective right. Narsimha Rao's speech on the August 15 was very strongly worded and was a blatant threat to Pakistan and Azad Kashmir's security. Our Foreign Office's response to this was extremely disappointing.

Our prime minister should have immediately taken the nation into confidence in a TV speech. A benefitting reply to Narsimha Rao's address should have been aired. In the absence of this, Nawaz Sharif had to make a statement to warn the Indians. I think it is in our national interest (smile). Indian public opinion will now press their government to resolve the Kashmir issue. They now feel threatened of Pakistan's nuclear capability.

The pretext that our Economic Aid shall get effected is baseless. We don't get US economic aid any more and our government cannot get us any anyway!

Why did Nawaz Sharif not make this statement ten months ago, when he was prime minister?

The circumstances were different then. An attack from India was not imminent. Nawaz Sharif's statement has averted an Indian attack. The prime minister

should have taken the matter up but since she didn't, Nawaz Sharif had to.

Chaudhry Sahib, why did you lose 1993's elections?

The Islamic front was the great spoiler in my case. I lost one seat by about 4000 votes where they polled 8500 votes. The other was lost by a margin of about 2600 votes.

The Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF)'s share in the constituency was about 4500 votes. I must add here that in my case we have found evidence of technical rigging too. The "authority" supervising the elections in my district was a close friend of my opponent.

National ID cards were not issued to my voters in time for the elections. The administration was instructed to go out of the way to issue these cards to my opponents' supporters in time, though.

This was a real setback. My complaint to the Interior Ministry and the GHQ's Election Monitoring Cell on this account is on record. I personally rang the G.O.C Siakot up to apprise him of the situation. Despite all this, I lost, albeit marginally.

Imran Masud and Pervaiz Elahi have both won despite my having lost the MNA's seat. It has lead me believe that my election was technically rigged.

You have been the "uncrowned emperor" of Gujrat for almost 15 years. Why has Ch. Ahmed Mukhtar been able to defeat you in elections?

Fifteen years in power is a long time to make friends and supporters. When one has been in power for that long, you are bound to create an "anti-vote-bank" too! Ch. Ahmed Mukhtar also had the benefit of the PPP votes.

And what about Nawabzada Ghanzafar Gul's constituency? Constituents complain of your total lack of interest in the area barring two public meetings.

Three meetings to be precise! (Laughs) Can you imagine that, I still polled about 72000 votes and lost only narrowly. I conceded that over confidence got the better of us there! It was a case of political miscalculation.

Nawaz Sharif claimed in parliament that 93's elections

